

The Siege Of Berlin.

We were going to the Champs-Élysées with Dr. V., gathering from the walls pierced by shells, the pavement plowed by grape-shot, the history of besieged Paris, when just before reaching the Place de l'Étoile, the doctor stopped and pointed out to me one of those large corner houses so pompously grouped around the Arc de Triomphe.

"Do you see," said he, "those four closed windows on the balcony up there? In the beginning of August, that terrible month of August of '70, so laden with storm and disaster, I was summoned there to attend a case of apoplexy. The sufferer was Colonel Jouve, an old cuirassier of the first empire, full of enthusiasm for glory and patriotism, who, at the commencement of the war, had taken an apartment with a balcony in the Champs-Élysées—for what do you think? To assist at the triumphal entry of our troops! Poor old man! The news of Vismoult arrived as he was rising from the table. On reading the name of Napoleon at the foot of that bulletin of defeat he fell senseless!

"I found the old cuirassier stretched upon the floor, his face bleeding, and inert as from the blow of a club. Standing, he would have been very tall; grim, he looked immense, with fine features, beautiful teeth and white, curling hair, carrying his eighty years as though they had been thirty. Beside him knelt his granddaughter in tears. She resembled him. Seeing them alone by side, they reminded me of two Greek medallions stamped with the same impress, only the one was antique, earth-stained, its outlines somewhat worn; the other, beautiful and clear, in all the luster of freshness.

"The child's sorrow touched me. Daughter and granddaughter of soldiers, her father was on MacMahon's staff, the sight of this old man stretched before her evoked in her mind another vision no less terrible. I did my best to reassure her, though in reality I had but little hope. We had to contend with monoplegia, from which at eighty there is small chance of recovery.

"For three days the patient remained in the same condition of immobility and stupor. Meanwhile came the news of Reichshoven—you remember how strangely? Till the evening we believed in a great victory—24,000 Prussians killed, the Crown Prince prisoner.

"I can not tell by what miracle, by what magnetic current, an echo of this national joy have reached our poor invalid, hitherto deaf to all around him; but that evening, on approaching the bed, I found a new man. His eye was almost clear, his speech less difficult, and he had the strength to smile and to stammer a few words.

"Victory, victory!"

"Yes, Colonel, a great victory. And as I gave the details of MacMahon's

was never-ending, edifying sermons about respect of property, the politeness due to ladies, and short, quite a code of military honor for the use of conquerors. With all this he put in some general reflections on politics and the conditions of the peace to be imposed on the vanquished. With regard to the latter, I must say he was not exacting.

"The war indemnity and nothing else. It is not well to take provinces. Can one turn Germany into France?"

"He dictated this with so firm a voice, and one felt so much sincerity in his words, so much patriotic faith, that it was impossible to listen to him unmoved.

"Meanwhile the siege went on—the siege of Berlin, alas! We were at the worst period of cold, of bombardment, of epidemic, of famine. But, thanks to our care and the indelible tenderness which surrounded him, the old man's serenity was never for a moment disturbed. Up to the end I was able to procure white bread and fresh meat for him, but for his only son. You could not imagine anything more touching than those breakfasts of the grandfather, so innocently egotistic, sitting up in bed, fresh and smiling, the grandfather under his chin, at his side his grand-daughter, pale from her privations, guiding his hands, making him drink, helping him to eat all these good, forbidden things (the revolver by the repeat, in the comfort of his warm room, with the wintry wind shut out and the snow eddying about the window, the old cuirassier would recall his northern campaigns and would relate to us that disastrous retreat in Russia, where there was nothing to eat but frozen biscuit and horseflesh.

"Can you understand that, little one? We are besieged!"

"I should think she did understand it. For two months she had tasted nothing else. As convalescence approached, our task increased daily in difficulty. The numbness of the colonel's senses, as well as of his limbs, which had hitherto helped him so much, was beginning to pass away. Once or twice already those terrible volleys at the Fort Maffait had made him start and prick up his ears like a war horse; we were obliged to invent victory of Bazein before Berlin and to make him believe that the Prussians were in honor of him. Another day (the Thursday of Luxemburg, I think it was), his bed had been pushed to the window, whence he saw some of the national guard massed upon the avenue de la Grande Armée.

"What soldiers are these?" he asked, and we heard him grumbling beneath his teeth:

"Badly drilled, badly drilled!"

"Nothing came of this, but we understood that henceforth greater precautions were necessary. Unfortunately, we were not careful enough.

"One evening, I was met by the child, in much trouble.

"It is to-morrow they make their entry," she said.

"Could the grandfather's door have been open?" In thinking of it since, I remember that all that evening his face wore an extraordinary expression. Probably he had overheard us; only we spoke of the Prussians and he thought of the French, of the triumph of the French, of the triumph of the French.

"He had so long expected MacMahon descending the avenue amid flowers and banners, the little Prussians, his own son riding beside the marshal, and he thought of the French, of the triumph of the French, of the triumph of the French.

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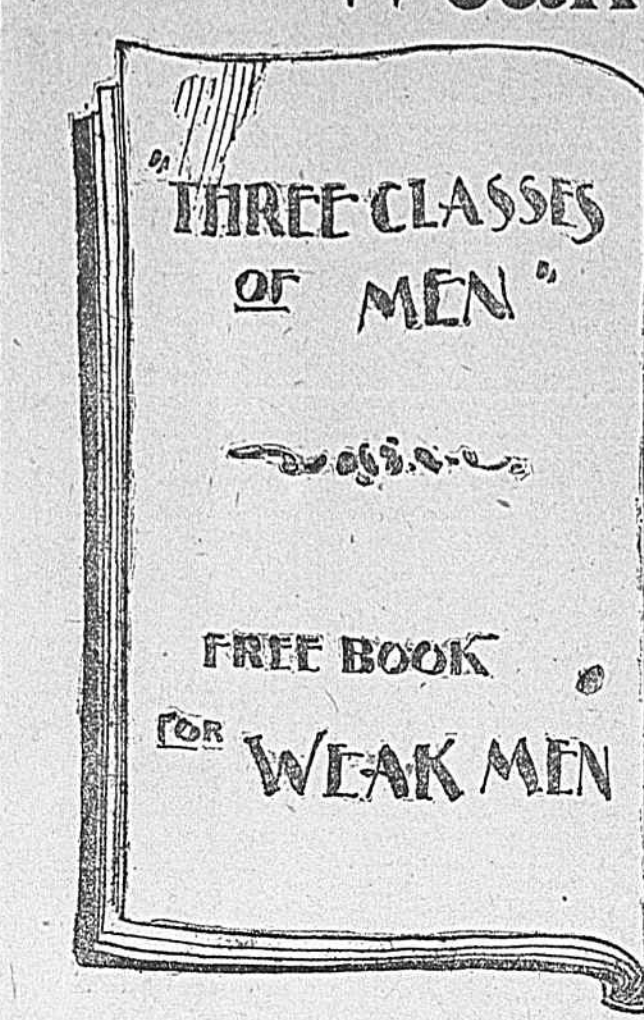
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